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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2615
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6441
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4231
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2828
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7407
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1445
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4789
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1010
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7140

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 005395

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND AFERNANDEZ,
IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Netherlands, Syria/South
Africa, Syria/Russia, Syria/Germany, Brammertz Report, Lebanon,
Iraq, Baker-Hamilton Report (12/13)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Dec. 13 reported the visit to
Damascus of Bernard Bot, Dutch Foreign Minister, and his meetings
with President Asad, PM Shara and FM Mouallem, focusing on
developments in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories.
Both sides agreed to enhance bilateral relations and agreed to
continue consultations about issues of common interest. An Al-Ba'th
headline featured a statement by FM Walid Mouallem reiterating the
need for a larger European role in establishing peace and stability
in the Middle East. For his part, the Dutch official stressed "the
significance of the Syrian role to help in accomplishing security
and stability in the region."

Papers also reported FM Mouallem's meeting with Essop Pahad, South
African Minister of Presidential Affairs, in anticipation of South
Africa's non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council starting
early next year. The meeting touched upon regional developments and
bilateral relations.

All papers featured a statement to SANA by Evgney Bazhanov, Deputy
Chairman of the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry,
reiterating the importance of Syria's role in the Middle East.
Professor Bazhanov said that Russia is coordinating efforts with
Syria to reach a just and comprehensive solution in the region based
on the relevant international resolutions, to secure an end to the
Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the occupied
Syrian Golan.

Papers also reported a statement by German Chancellor Angela Merkel
defending German FM Steinmeier's trip to Syria, which Olmert labeled
as a "mistake." Merkel also supported the Baker-Hamilton's
Commission's recommendations.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

President Asad reviews current developments with Dutch Foreign
Minister Bernard Bot, confirming Syria's peaceful inclination and
concern about a just and comprehensive peace" (Government-owned

Tishreen, 12/13)

"Bot: Talks were very positive and constructive. Mouallem: We hold dialogue, but we do not accept orders" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/13)

"German Chancellor Merkel emphasizes that Syria is a partner in the region" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/13)

"Qatar calls for finding an honorable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. UN Chief Annan calls on Israel to withdraw from occupied Golan: The UN Security Council is criticized for its double-standards policy in carrying out its resolutions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/13)

"The Lebanese open sit-in enters its 12th day. President Lahoud calls on France to return al-Sadiq, the false witness in the assassination of former Lebanese PM Hariri. Senior Lebanese officials call for early elections and accuse Washington and Paris of violating Lebanese sovereignty" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/13)

"The 3rd report of Serge Brammertz, Head of UN International Independent Investigation Commission into the assassination of former Lebanese PM Hariri: Syria has cooperated efficiently, while other countries refused to cooperate" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/13)

"Evgney Bazhanov, Deputy Chairman of the Diplomatic Academy affiliated with the Russian Foreign Ministry, confirms deep-rooted relations between Syria and Russia: We are unifying efforts to reach a just and comprehensive solution in the region" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/13)

"Five US soldiers killed in al-Anbar and Diwaniya. 300 Iraqis killed or injured in an explosion in Baghdad. Speaker of the Iraqi

Parliament Al-Mashhadni invites the Iraqi resistance to the negotiating table" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/13)

"An opinion poll shows that Americans support dialogue with Syria and Iran and the Baker-Hamilton's recommendations" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/13)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Even Though Hated by its Beneficiaries"

Ali Qasim, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/13):

"The Baker-Hamilton report was categorically rejected by some parties.... Those rejecting the report meet in one point, namely, clinging to the US occupation and its continuation despite the tragic reality in Iraq, because their interests will be in danger once the occupation ends...."

"The US Administration is sending a set of contradictory signals which give those opposed to the Baker-Hamilton report a chance to explicitly reject ending the occupation, in a last attempt to dissuade the Bush administration from accepting the report...."

"Bush, Staying the Course or Moving Ahead?"

Fayiz Izz-al-Din, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/12): "Perhaps it is not the first time the United States is suffering a strategic failure in an issue of war or peace since the end of World War II...."

"This is a compound failure in the strategy of the US Administration, lead by President Bush, and the administration of

the conservative right wing....

"What is noteworthy in the Baker-Hamilton Report is the confession of the US intelligence community's failure to understand the gunmen who are launching continuous attacks in Iraq. This has impeded policymakers in the United States from taking the necessary decisions....

"Further confusion in the Bush administration added to this compound failure when Rumsfeld, who was a scapegoat for failure in the US elections, stated that the Iraqi course is no longer feasible and that US policy in Iraq must change.... This announcement of failure isolates the Bush administration more than ever...."

"Bush's Democracy and the Mythology of Victory"

Salim Abbud, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/13): "Despite all his political and military defeats in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Latin America, in addition to his defeat in the latest US elections and the Baker-Hamilton report that acknowledged the failure of his policy in Iraq, Bush is still using the language of victory....

"According to Bush and his administration, democracy means full submission to Zionist-American desires.... The democracy that Bush presents is an invitation to accept Zionist-American colonization, in which democracy becomes a US game to support its projects and the regimes that devoted the capabilities of their people and countries to support US wars on Arabs....

"The Bush administration's policies feed hatred against America.... Bush must give up his mythologies and Zionist thoughts, because the future of America and its relations with the world are in danger...."

"Why Early Elections?"

Ghazi al-Dada, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (12/13): "Ever since HAMAS won the elections, the Palestinian people have been under a Western economic embargo in general and a US embargo in particular, not to mention the Israeli military siege that employs the toughest forms of terrorist practices....

"We wonder what will happen if HAMAS wins the elections again.... Will the unfair siege against the Palestinian people end? Is the United States in particular going to continue to fight and punish Palestinian democracy....?"

Roebuck